

## **Supporting People Strategy 2007 Briefing**

Communities and Local Government (CLG) launched the *Supporting People (SP) Strategy* on June 20. Sitra welcomes publication of the strategy as it sets some clear direction for *Supporting People* and re-emphasises the government's commitment to the programme. This briefing looks at the key themes set out in the strategy and at the implications for stakeholders.

The strategy builds on the proposals outlined in the Next Steps Consultation document (2005) and addresses some of the outstanding issues, including that of statutory protection for *Supporting People* services. However, there are interesting differences, including a shift away from the three broad client groupings: people with care and support needs, older people and the socially excluded. The terminology has been dropped, although it seems fairly clear that some of the principles outlined in the strategy will be more appropriate for some client groups than others.

The strategy is based on four key themes:

- *keeping people that need services at the heart of the programme and of local delivery of the service;*
- *building on partnerships with the Third Sector;*
- *delivering in the new local government landscape, and;*
- *Increasing efficiency and reducing bureaucracy.*

It does not address future funding levels or say anything about the question of distribution of funding. We will have to wait for the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review before we know how much money there will be and how it will be allocated across the country. This is still the outstanding critical issue in terms of how effectively government and local authorities can deliver on the vision outlined in the strategy.

### **A Vision for *Supporting People***

The government's vision for *Supporting People* is to support independence and opportunity.

A welcome statement at the outset of the strategy keeps a focus on the role of housing in increasing opportunity and improving quality of life. There has been some

concern that the programme is drifting away from this focus, but the strategy restates the role of *Supporting People* in ensuring that individuals, through housing support, have:

- the life skills they need to live independently
- support in gaining and maintaining settled accommodation
- help to identify training and job opportunities
- support to access utility services and benefits
- support to ensure their existing accommodation meets their accessibility and/or safety needs

### **Keeping people that need services at the heart of the programme**

The strategy sets out a list of commitments to service users and arrangements for support for service user involvement at local authority and provider level. In a new proposal, with echoes of the Housing Corporation's approach to residents' charters, the CLG wants to encourage local authorities (LAs) and providers to develop service user involvement plans and "Charters for Independent Living" which will set out standards for SP services. There is some hope expressed in the strategy that the charters will provide some guarantees for ensuring that mobile client groups will have access to services.

The CLG also has plans to publish their own service user involvement charter on the kweb. The Quality Assurance Framework is supported as a way of ensuring that service users have a voice in how their support is delivered. We welcome the focus on greater service user involvement and will work with the CLG and other relevant government departments to raise the outstanding issues about reward or reimbursement for those service users that want to get more involved at provider and strategic level.

### ***Integrated assessment***

Integrated assessment is seen as a way of addressing issues of multiple assessment processes and lack of joined up working. The strategy identifies work to be done to develop more choice and control at the point of access to services. It also describes plans to develop and pilot an integrated assessment framework where people can be assessed for health, social care and support at the same time. Based on work in Brighton and Hove and in Nottingham City, the CLG will be looking to develop a national model.

More and more authorities are already considering integrated assessments and single access points to services. There are many potential benefits of introducing such a system, particularly for users who require more than one kind of service. In some cases, it may help service users confused by the array of potential arrangements to access services. However, there are potential problems, particularly for some of the excluded groups and some people from BME communities, who may find single access points a barrier to access. Central registers can also become bureaucratic and slow which could impact on utilisation rates and rental income in accommodation based services. Providers and commissioners will need to work closely together to ensure

such processes really improve access to services for people with support needs - and have enough flexibility to ensure that they do not act as a barrier to some groups.

### ***Meeting the needs of mobile groups and individuals***

The strategy reaffirms the Government's support for ensuring that local boundaries don't become obstacles to choice and access to services. Local authorities are expected to plan services at the sub-regional and regional levels - and the strategy restates the expectation in the grant conditions that service users who need support should be able to access services where they need to do so. It is apparent that this works better in some areas than others - and there is still concern that the local focus of *Supporting People* overrides the need for mobile groups and individuals.

Later on in the strategy, the potential of Multi Area Agreements (MAAs) is referred to. Though at an early stage, MAAs may present opportunities, along with regional working, for ensuring that access is not closed down for people with needs that need to be met by LAs working together. The 'Charters for Independent Living' are also expected to clearly state that *Supporting People* should meet the needs of mobile groups though the success of this approach will depend on how much weight they have locally.

### ***Alternative models of service provision***

Service user choice through the use of Individual Budgets continues as a theme in the strategy and although the document acknowledges that current pilots are at an early stage, it suggests that there should be real benefits, both for individuals and commissioners, if more effective and cost effective approaches can be found. Individual budgets are not just seen as potential options for long term service users but potentially for meeting some short term needs as well. However, it is also recognised that this model is not necessarily appropriate for all service users and that alternative approaches will need to be considered.

For those individuals who are not keen on managing their own package, service brokerage and 'support planning' through independent bodies is suggested as a model to support individuals in having more control. The idea of the *Lead Professional* model is raised as a potential way of working with service users to manage individual budgets - and there may be a potential role for housing support providers to take on this role.

Clearly, individual budgets have some potential for expanding choice for some services users. But there are some very real practical issues that will need to be addressed and we will examine the outcomes of the pilots with interest. In spite of some piloting involving *Supporting People* monies, the models appear to be very care driven. Alternatives though advocacy or brokerage seems more suited to individuals who already have social workers or are in contact with statutory services. So, there will still be an important place for commissioning provider based service models, with the focus on choice and control achieved through service user involvement.

## **Enhancing Partnership with the Third Sector**

The strategy contains a clear recognition of the important role third sector providers have played in developing and delivering *Supporting People* services over many years. There is a read across here to the CLGs Third sector Strategy Discussion paper, where there are more detailed proposals about how government can engage better with providers, as well as with the work of the Office of the Third Sector, in setting out the practical steps to achieve better engagement.

The strategy then goes on to talk about the challenges in relation to user choice, better value for money and a more professional approach to service delivery. CLG makes a commitment to minimise obstacles for good quality providers to compete fairly for services. It also says it will improve commissioning across local authorities. Hact and Sitra are being funded to take some of this work forward, particularly around support for Third Sector organisations.

LAs are expected to comply with the compact; pass on three year funding certainty through SP contracts to ensure that they address capacity building issues with their providers. Authorities will also work with Sitra and others to support and build capacity in the sector.

In turn, providers are expected to work with authorities on service user involvement and ensure that their services are providing good value for money. More partnership and collaboration, between providers delivering SP contracts through consortia and other types of partnership approaches, will be expected. This echoes a strong steer in the Third sector Strategy paper on partnership as a way to deliver public services.

We very much welcome the positive statements about the value of the Third Sector and we are committed to working with all stakeholders to support providers in the delivery of *Supporting People* services. Commissioning practice in some authorities has appeared to work against smaller providers in particular and there is still a sense that government statements about support is more rhetoric than reality. We hope that the commitments set out in the SP and Third Sector strategies will begin to address some of the very real difficulties faced by providers, particularly around full cost recovery and the ability to bid for contracts in a level playing field. We agree that partnership is potentially a positive way for providers to deliver large contracts and there is a great deal still to be done from both the commissioning and provider perspective to ensure that this can happen in a constructive and effective way.

## **Delivering in the new local government landscape**

The strategy reaffirms the LAs role as a leader across all public services in their area and specifically mentions the issues of planning for Older People. It flags up the forthcoming publication of a National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society, where LAs will have a key delivery role. The importance of links with wider Sustainable Communities Strategies is highlighted, as is the need for co-ordination between *Supporting People* and the wider regional housing agendas.

As expected, the intention is to integrate *Supporting People* into Local Area Agreements, (LAAs) from 2009, though interestingly there still appears to be a

question mark over exactly how this will work. The paper states that it is the Government's ambition to deliver the programme through LAAs at the earliest opportunity but that this will be subject to the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review and an evaluation of a testing period of *Supporting People* funding within LAAs. In 2008/9, CLG will offer a selection of authorities the freedom to deliver *Supporting People* through their LAAs for a time bound period, in order to look at the impact and benefits. This will then inform their decision about the most appropriate delivery mechanism for *Supporting People*.

The potential of MAAs as a mechanism for collaboration across authorities is also mentioned and CLG will be working with authorities that are developing this approach to explore how they might be used to address cross boundary issues and provide solutions for mobile groups.

In its drive to reduce bureaucracy, the government intends to move to less than a third of the number of Public Service Agreements (PSAs) which will be underpinned by a set of 200 performance indicators (PIs). These have yet to be announced but the PIs are seen as an important way to ensure that *Supporting People* remains a priority within LAAs. The national outcomes framework and existing key performance indicators are also seen as key to providing evidence of the effectiveness of the programme and will feature in the new Local Government Performance framework.

### ***Statutory basis for Supporting People***

There are no plans to introduce a stronger statutory basis for *Supporting People* and much is made of the potential of "Charters for Independent Living", along with the effective use of the performance framework as a means to ensuring services for people that need them.

In spite of this, many providers remain concerned about the potential impact of LAAs on *Supporting People* services, especially for excluded groups. It is vital that we continue to work at national, regional and local level to ensure that the needs of the socially excluded remain firmly on the agenda.

### ***Funding and investment***

We will have to wait for the CSR before we know about the overall pot and its distribution. In the meantime, new investment continues to be a matter for the LA but there does appear to be some flexibility left open for alternatives. There is strong support for LAs to work collaboratively with Regional Assemblies to consider how housing support needs are addressed in regional housing strategies. In addition, CLG have commissioned work along with the Housing Corporation and Care Services Improvement Partnership to look at how housing support is addressed within regional housing strategies and the possible linkages with *Supporting People*. They appear to be suggesting that they may consider the case for changing how revenue funding for housing support is made available as part of and future housing investment programmes. They are also looking at the implications of housing growth for *Supporting People* and have not ruled out direct central government investment in services with national importance.

CLG have clearly recognised the problems, raised during the consultation period, about lack of co-ordination between capital and revenue investment. We look forward to future discussions about how this might be improved.

### ***Increasing efficiency and reducing bureaucracy***

Efficiency remains firmly on the government's agenda and the strategy suggests that growth to meet unmet need will have to be based on efficiencies. A national *Supporting People* Value Improvement Programme will build on the work carried out by the 11 original pilot projects and co-ordinate work with local authorities to maximise value for money.

### ***Reducing Bureaucracy***

Government has reduced some of the reporting requirements for LAs and expresses an expectation that LAs will not need to carry out the same level of data collection from providers. This is welcome news and echoes the fact that some LAs are already looking at more efficient contract management arrangements following service reviews. It will be interesting to see how LAs embrace the idea of reduced monitoring requirements with providers, especially now that the outcomes framework is in place for *Supporting People* services.

### ***Conclusion***

Overall, the strategy sets a positive direction for *Supporting People* and there are some very welcome messages about the importance of the Third Sector in delivering services. The document also appears to recognise the needs of socially excluded and mobile groups. There remain challenges, not least the impact of commissioning arrangements and the choice agenda on providers. Ultimately though, effective delivery of the strategy will depend on the outcome, later in the year of the CSR.

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